

**A communal nest of Lappet-faced Vulture
Torgos tracheliotus (Forster) and East African
Greater Kestrel, *Falco rupicoloides arthuri* (Gurney)**

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

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Myles Turner, a Park Warden in the Serengeti National Park, in Tanzania, has sent me the details of an interesting occurrence of communal nesting by a Lappet-faced Vulture and an East African Greater Kestrel in the neighbourhood of Seronera, in the Western Serengeti region.

The vulture's nest was found on 9th May 1964 at the top of a 15 feet high *Pappea capensis* Eck and Zey in full leaf growing amongst the rocks of a small isolated inselberg on an open plain. The shade of this tree was selected as a suitable place for the Director of the Tanzania National Parks (John Owen), who was on tour, and Turner to have lunch. Their attention was attracted to the nest when a pair of kestrels flew away from it. They hovered nearby and then flew off about 200 yards and perched on a rock. Turner climbed up to the nest to investigate and was unaware of the brooding vulture until he actually peered over the rim of the nest and the huge bird took off at very close range and its identity was unmistakable.



Turner was astonished to find a vulture's egg in a slight depression in the nest and only 2 feet 4 inches distant in another depression four kestrel eggs. As the short space between the two lots of eggs was quite flat the vulture and the kestrel when brooding must have been visible to each other—an interesting association. About five minutes after flying away

the vulture returned and flew very slowly and low over the nest and then disappeared not to return. The vulture's egg and two of the kestrel eggs—all were fresh—were collected and sent to the British Museum (Natural History).

The nest, a massive structure of sticks and coarse twigs and without lining, was carefully measured—its dimensions being 6' by 6' and 2' thick. The leg bones of Thomson's Gazelle and some hair were in the nest, as well as some odd gazelle bones. The tree had been recently used by a Leopard for storing its Thomson's Gazelle kill; the carcass had been hanging just below the nest—another curious association.

At the time of the discovery of the nest the countryside was rapidly drying up after the long rains.

Fifty days later, on 29th June, the nest was revisited; the vulture had not laid again but a kestrel was sitting on the two eggs which had been previously left and it was concluded they must have been infertile.

Turner's photographs show the nest tree and its surroundings, and the eggs *in situ* (unfortunately two of the kestrel eggs had been removed prior to the photography).



I am greatly indebted to Myles Turner for this valuable account, to the Trustees and the Director of the Tanzania National Parks for permission for its publication, to Dr. P. J. Greenway of the East Africa Herbarium, Nairobi, for the identification of the nest tree, and to C. J. O. Harrison, British Museum (Natural History) for checking the egg measurements.

The vulture's egg measures 91.4 x 64.3 mm. and is a dirty white, almost imperceptibly pitted, with faint, narrow, even smears of light brown all over and concentrations of the same pallid colour on the broad top and

at the pointed end. The kestrel eggs are typically coloured and marked with specks and spots or broad smears and smudges of burnt umber or dark rufous brown; two of them measure 40.8 x 31.7 and 41.0 x 31.9 mm. The measurements of four sets, each of four eggs, of this kestrel which I obtained from the Blayney Percival collection and which had been taken on the Athi Plains, in Kenya, range from 38.1–41.5 x 29.9–32.3 mm., and average 39.64 x 31.34 mm. Scarcely two of these sixteen eggs are alike, though all are typically kestrel. The Greater Kestrel normally utilises the old nests of tree-breeding raptors for its own eggs.

There seem to be no published records of a similar combined nest; also I have been unable to obtain any additional information on this interesting subject from local correspondents.

The eggs of the White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis* (Sharpe)

by C. J. O. HARRISON and S. A. PARKER

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According to Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1955) the eggs and nest of the White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis* are undescribed. In revising part of the collection of the British Museum (Natural History), two clutches of this species were discovered, one of which was taken together with the parent bird. The eggs had tentatively been assigned to this species or to *Pycnonotus layardi*, prior to the identification of the parent bird.

Both clutches were collected by L. M. Seth-Smith at Mpumu, Uganda in 1915. One was taken on 15th March (B. M. no. 1920.6.7.4–5) and given the set-mark 55. The accompanying note states—"2 eggs fresh. Nest a typical Bulbul's *P. layardi* shot close to nest but eggs not like those of *P. layardi*. No other bird seen near nest although I waited for a long time. In forest. Nest of the slung variety which I have seen in *layardi* before but not common." The eggs are long, elliptical oval, with a high gloss. They are a pinkish-beige colour with many fine grey markings towards the larger end giving this a general greyish appearance, and with a concentrated zone of grey markings wreathing the larger end just beyond its broadest part. They measure 24.7 x 15.9 and 23.4 x 15.6 mm.

The second clutch was taken on 25th March (B. M. no. 1920.6.7.12–13) and given the set-mark 56. The accompanying note states—"Slightly incubated. Believed to be the same as no. 55 as eggs are very similar and nest identical. Bird had to be shot at close quarters as nest was in thick forest—kept for identification. Nest 1ft. from ground, 150 yards from (nest) 55, probably same pair." The specimen referred to is in the museum collection (B. M. 1920.6.7.178) and is a female. The eggs are very glossy but more ovate than the previous clutch and a deeper buff in colour, the wreath of darker markings around the larger end of each appearing purplish, while in addition one shows some pale brown scrawlings sparsely distributed around the large end and along one side. They measure 21.3 x 15.2 and 21.7 x 15.4 mm. In view of the difference it seems unlikely that these would be successive clutches of the same pair.

Reference:

Mackworth-Praed, C. W. and Grant, C. H. B. 1955. *African Handbook of Birds*, series 1, Eastern and South Eastern Africa, vol. 2, London,